



MEMORANDUM

City Manager's Office

DATE: June 23, 2020
TO: Mayor and Council
THROUGH: Steve McHarris, City Manager *Steve McHarris*
FROM: Ashwini Kantak, Assistant City Manager
SUBJECT: Status Update Regarding City Operations

Background

On March 12, in response to the growing Coronavirus threat and the State of California's declaration of a state of emergency, City Manager Steve McHarris declared a local emergency. On March 16, Santa Clara County and six other Bay Area counties announced a Shelter-In-Place order for all but essential activities, and the City of Milpitas moved to Stage 5, the highest response level, of its Pandemic Response Plan. In addition to activating the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), this meant that:

- All City facilities were closed to the public, including the Permit center;
- All Recreation and Community Services facilities were closed to the public, and programming was suspended aside from essential community services such as the Senior Nutrition Program;
- All public meetings including City Council meetings were conducted using a virtual format; and
- Community events were cancelled

The City Manager's Office and senior staff recognized the significant impact of the pandemic on City employees and services to the community and quickly mobilized to address this. To ensure that critical operations could continue and have minimal impact on the community, some employees from Police, Fire, Public Works, Information Technology (IT), Finance, and Recreation and Community Services continued to provide services in the field. To support all other services remotely, IT staff quickly enabled technology and tools to allow remote access and employees that could perform their work remotely were asked to telework.

For those part time employees and some full-time employees not able to telework, Council approved temporary emergency pay for all employees through April 7, which was subsequently through April 11. City operations continued to adapt based on County orders, and in April, part time employees who could not perform their regular jobs ceased to be paid, while full time employees that could not perform their regular jobs, were assigned other work or were allowed to use vacation banks.

This memorandum provides a status update on current City operations and on employee engagement related to this effort.

City Operations and Remote Work

Since the Shelter-In-Place has taken effect, taking care of our employees and community has been our top priority. As stated earlier, providing teleworking opportunities to employees has allowed them to continue to work and provide high levels of service to our community while reducing risk of exposure to COVID-19.

As described below, services to the community, with the exception of services not allowed under the public health orders, such as in-person recreation programs, large events, and after school programs, have continued seamlessly either through in-person or virtual means.

On Site Services

Since March 17, Police and Fire staff have continued to provide public safety services in person. Public Works and Finance staff working in the field were initially focused on utilities, and emergency services for streets and trees but have now transitioned to providing all services. Staggered and separate staffing shifts were utilized to minimize exposure and to ensure the ability to continue to provide essential services. A very limited number of employees from other departments such as IT and Recreation and Community Services, worked on site, all other employees were asked to work remotely. As the County orders have been updated, additional employees have begun to work in the field including fire prevention and construction inspectors and staff supporting COVID-19 testing activities.

Virtual Services

Due to prior investments in technology staff was quickly able to pivot to many internal and external virtual services including:

1. **Development Services** – using the online building and planning permit system (Trak-It) and video meetings (Zoom), staff has been able to process approximately 625 building and planning permits, performed 890 plan reviews, conducted over 2500 number of inspections, completed 22 outdoor dining registrations, and processed 30 business licenses since March 17.
2. **Bill Payments** – credit card transaction limits have been increased and a cash payment option at convenience stores has made it easy for residents and businesses to remit payments to the City.
3. **Forms 700 and Campaign Reports** – all individuals required to file Form 700 or campaign finance reports are able to do so through our online filing system (Netfile); payments can also be made via credit cards starting early July.
4. **Virtual Community Center and Events** – several activities and classes have moved to a virtual format allowing people of all ages to participate; events that are typically celebrated through large gatherings have been moved to a virtual and interactive format.
5. **Community Assistance** – staff have been able to reach out to the businesses through a webinar, a resource center offered in multiple languages, and regular electronic communications; staff has also partnered with Milpitas Unified School District, the County, non-profits and local businesses to provide several COVID-19 related services to the community including mobile COVID-19 testing, rent relief, and the distribution of food and face coverings.
6. **Council, Subcommittee, and Commission meetings** – all public meetings are being conducted virtually and the public is offered multiple ways to watch and provide public comment, the City's agenda management system (MuniCode) effectively supports meeting preparation work to be done remotely.
7. **Community Meetings** – a text messaging application combined with video meetings has been used to engage the community on specific projects and topics to ensure a high level of public participation even during the pandemic.
8. **COVID-19 Communications** – Council, community, businesses, and employees have been kept apprised of relevant COVID-19 information through the City website, social media, email, and weekly press releases and information memos.

9. **Emergency Operations Center** – all EOC staff have been in daily communications through video meetings and collaboration sites, ensuring that EOC functions are able to be conducted effectively and without interruption.
10. **Procurement and Contract Approvals** – the City’s new procurement system (ProcureNow), combined with an electronic approval system (DocuSign), has allowed procurements and contract execution to move forward efficiently.
11. **Recruitments** – Human Resources staff has been working with hiring managers to conduct recruitments using the new application system (NeoGov) and video meetings.
12. **FY 2020-21 Budget** – community outreach, budget study sessions, and City Council budget adoption were successfully conducted using an electronic survey (Open Town Hall) and virtual meetings.
13. **Miscellaneous City business** – long range planning, strategic plans and master plan projects along with various City initiatives and regular City business have continued seamlessly through online collaboration and virtual meetings.

Onsite Staff Protocols

In accordance with the County’s guidance, “Social Distancing Protocol - COVID-19 Site-Specific Protection Plan” documents have been posted and actions outlined in these documents are being implemented. City administration and EOC staff have also developed a [Plan for Phasing-In City Operations](#). This plan outlines four operational levels, and related decision criteria, workplace practices, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements, prevention measures, and engineering and administrative controls.

All employees working on site have been provided the appropriate job specific Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), social distancing guidance, and screening protocols, in accordance with the latest Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines to reduce the risk of exposure.

Self-check protocols have been provided to all employees who returned to the office or field, including those who are providing support of construction activity, specifically Building, Fire and Engineering Inspectors.

To allow for an easy and touchless self-check process, the City has developed an electronic fillable [Self-Check Health Form](#). The IT Department, in collaboration with HR, has also created a Self-Check Health Mobile App for employees that will be released soon. This will enable employees to complete their self-check form on their own mobile device. Managers will receive notifications and employees with reportable symptoms will be asked to stay away from the workplace.

City administration has also developed COVID-19 Exposure Control Protocols, which provide details on what to do if:

- an employee tested positive for COVID-19;
- an employee is experiencing symptoms but has not tested positive for COVID-19; and
- an employee is asymptomatic but has had close contact with:
 - person(s) known to have COVID-19,
 - a symptomatic person, or
 - a person otherwise reasonably suspected to have COVID-19 based on information from a reliable source.

In addition, the City has prepared a readily available [Return to Work General Workplace Guidance Checklist](#) for employees.

Currently about half of the employees of the City of Milpitas are working remotely, while the other half are essential onsite employees who are working in the field or onsite.

Employee Engagement

The City Manager's Office and department heads have engaged employees since the onset of the pandemic. On April 13, City leadership conducted a virtual town hall meeting for all employees. The City Manager's Office, Finance, and Human Resources presented information specific to the COVID-19 emergency including a staffing plan, fiscal impact and budget update, and resources available to employees during this time. The virtual town hall was recorded and posted on the City's intranet site for those who were unable to attend.

All information memos and press releases related to COVID-19 have been shared with all employees and posted on the City's website.

The City also conducted a survey to seek employee feedback on the draft Phased-in City Operations Plan. One hundred fifty-six employees completed the survey, which was conducted June 1st through June 8th. The majority of employees agreed that the City's Phasing-In Plan would keep them safe (66.7%). Majorities also indicated that they have received the support to balance their work during this time (66%), they have received the right amount of communication (79%), and they feel supported by their manager (75%).

A strong majority of employees currently teleworking indicated a preference to continue to do so in the near term. The three most common concerns expressed about returning to the workplace were increased risk of exposure due to interaction with the public, risk of exposure due to interaction with fellow employees, and the cleanliness of common employee spaces.

Further employee engagement efforts are currently underway. The City has set up a virtual suggestion box on the intranet to allow employees to submit concerns and feedback regarding the Phased-in City Operations Plan. Staff is also in the process of creating a volunteer employee engagement group, with representatives from departments, to garner additional input into the plan based on each department's needs.

In addition, we have communicated to employees that they may be eligible per the Families First Coronavirus Resources Act (FFCRA) for Emergency Paid Sick leave and/or Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act.

The following Policies and Applications/Forms are available to employees on the City intranet and the HR Website:

- [Policy: Telework During an Emergency Through Recovery](#)
- [Application: Telework During an Emergency Through Recovery](#)
- [Policy: Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act and Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Request Form: FFCRA Emergency Paid Sick Leave](#)
- [Request Form: FFCRA Family Medical Leave Expansion Act](#)

Proposed Approach for Phased-In City Operations

Staff, through their work in the EOC, are continuing to monitor County and State guidance as well as review phasing in plans in the public and private sector across the world. As the public health orders continue to change, City operations will continue to adapt, with employee and community safety continuing to be a top priority

With the updated June 5 order from the County, staff is preparing to open summer days camps on June 29; however, outdoor pools and other in person classes and activities are not planned to be opened at this time. Additional detail on recreation programs is available in this [Information Memo](#).

At this time, staff is not recommending making any significant changes to the number of on-site employees. Teleworking will be continued through July and likely for several months thereafter. The City administration will continue to evaluate the need to have more employees return to the workplace and any such transitions will be implemented once controls and measures have been put in place to do this in a safe manner.

As described earlier, the City is continuing to provide services to the community through virtual means in addition to providing in-person services such as public safety, utility operations, and essential inspection and maintenance activities.

Any information about major operational changes will continue to be communicated with the City Council and the community at large, in a timely manner.